

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 2827

EXDIS

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TAGS: PFOR GR US

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S SPEECH-COMMENTS BY BITSIOS

REF: ATHENS 2801

1. AT THE OUTSET OF MY MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS APR 12, HE TOLD ME THAT PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS HAD NOT BEEN "VERY HAPPY" WITH SOME ASPECTS OF THE PRESIDENTS SPEECH. I EXPRESSED SURPRISE AND ASKED WHY.

2. BITSIOS SAID THE PRIME MINISTER FELT THAT IF THE USG WAS ENDEAVORING TO CONDUCT AN IMPARTIAL AND EVENHANDED POLICY AS BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY, THE PRESIDENTS REMARKS ABOUT THE TWO COUNTRIES DID NOT REFLECT IT. HE MENTIONED THE LONG PASSAGES DISCUSSING THE IMPORTANCE OF TURKEY AND THE REFERENCE TO TURKEY AS "AN OLD AND FAITHFUL ALLY." HE SAID, IN A FRIENDLY AND BANTERING WAY, THAT CARAMANLIS HAD SPECIFICALLY QUERIED HIM ABOUT THIS CHARACTERIZATION OF TURKEY, INQUIRING IF HE HAD OVERLOOKED IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS LINKING TURKEY WITH THE UNITED STATES. BY CONTRAST, BITSIOS SAID, CARAMANLIS HAD NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT MERELY "SYMPATHIZED" WITH THE NEW DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN GREECE, WHICH HAD IN FACT ALWAYS BEEN A LOYAL AND FAITHFUL ALLY.

3. CARAMANLIS WAS ALSO PUZZLED AND CONCERNED, ACCORDING TO BITSIOS, ABOUT THE STATEMENT THAT FORCES MIGHT BE
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SET IN MOTION "WITHIN AND BETWEEN" GREECE AND TURKEY

WHICH COULD NOT BE REVERSED. HE SAID THAT CARAMANLIS WANTED THE USG TO KNOW THAT HE AND HIS GOVERNMENT WERE FULLY IN CONTROL WITHIN THE COUNTRY, AND AS FAR AS THE WORD "BETWEEN" WAS CONCERNED, HE HAD BEEN UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THE US WOULD NOT COUNTENANCE OR "TOLERATE" ANY CONFLICT BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY.

4. FINALLY, BITSIOS SAID, HE AND CARAMANLIS REGRETTED THAT IT HAD BEEN DECIDED IN WASHINGTON TO GO AHEAD AND REFER PUBLICLY TO THE POSSIBILITIES OF SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO GREECE WITHOUT ANY "ADVANCE WARNING" TO THE GOG. HE SAID THIS HAD CAUGHT THEM A LITTLE OFF BASE BEFORE THEY HAD HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO PREPARE PUBLIC OPINION OR CONSULT WITH PARLIAMENTARY LEADERS ABOUT THE MATTER. HE SAID THAT THEY HAD WITHHELD ANY PUBLIC COMMENT UNTIL CARAMANLIS COULD OBSERVE THE REACTION IN THE COUNTRY BUT THAT THE PM WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO MAKE SOME KIND OF STATEMENT OVER THE WEEKEND, GIVING HIS GOVERNMENTS POSITION ON THE MATTER.

5. I TOLD BITSIOS THAT I THOUGHT HE WAS PICKING AT FAR LESS SIGNIFICANT POINTS ABOUT THE PRESIDENTS REMARKS AND MISSING THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF ITS OVERALL THRUST AND MEANING. AS FOR THE CHARACTERIZATIONS AND LENGTH OF REMARKS ABOUT GREECE AND TURKEY IN THE SPEECH, I SAID THAT THE PARAGRAPH CONCERNING ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO GREECE WAS LOADED WITH IMPORT AND SIGNIFICANCE. THIS CLEARLY REPRESENTED A MAJOR DECISION IN WASHINGTON, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESIDENT MAKING SUCH A STATEMENT TO THE CONGRESS SHOULD NOT BE DISCOUNTED. AS FOR SETTING FORCES IN MOTION "WITHIN" THE COUNTRY, I SAID I FELT SURE THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS REFERRING TO THE STRONG PSYCHOLOGICAL AND NATIONALISTIC PRESSURES THAT COULD BE GENERATED IN BOTH GREECE AND TURKEY, CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH SOME INCIDENT COULD TRIGGER AN OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE AND HOSTILITIES, AND THAT HE WAS NOT REFERRING TO THE AUTHORITY OR THE SECURITY OF THE CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT IN TERMS OF INTERNAL FORCES THAT MIGHT SEEK TO TOPPLE IT. AS TO THE PROBLEM "BETWEEN" TURKEY AND GREECE, I SAID I HAD A SEPARATE MESSAGE ON THAT

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AND WE COULD DISCUSS THIS ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM SEPARATELY.

6. FINALLY, I SAID, IT SEEMED QUITE EVIDENT TO ME THAT THE PRESIDENTS STATEMENT COULD NOT HELP BUT BE OF OVERALL BENEFIT TO GREECE AND THIS SHOULD NOT BE LOST SIGHT OF BECAUSE SHORTNESS OF TIME PRECLUDED HAVING A FULL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ABOUT IT BEFORE THE SPEECH WAS DELIVERED. BITSIOS ACKNOWLEDGED THIS. I SAID I HOPED ANY STATEMENT

THE PRIME MINISTER MADE WOULD BE FRAMED WITH THIS IN MIND. BITSIOS SAID HE WOULD CONVEY MY THOUGHTS TO CARAMANLIS BUT ADDED THAT WE SHOULD ALSO BEAR IN MIND THAT ANY STATEMENT CARAMANLIS MADE HAD TO BE PREPARED WITH AN EYE ON THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IN GREECE AND ALSO THE PROBLEM OF CYPRUS. CARAMANLIS COULD NOT AFFORD TO LET MAVROS, PAPANDREOU, THE PRESS AND OTHERS BLAST HIM FOR APPEARING TO ACCEPT ASSISTANCE FROM THE U.S. IN EXCHANGE FOR GREECE ABANDONING THE CAUSE OF ITS CYPRIOT BRETHREN OR FOR ALLOWING THE US AND NATO TO MAINTAIN MILITARY BASES AND FACILITIES IN GREECE. I SAID WE WERE NOT ASKING GREECE TO SACRIFICE CYPRUS OR ANYTHING ELSE, BUT RATHER WERE PROPOSING THAT WE BOTH COOPERATE MORE CLOSELY AND EFFECTIVELY TO REACH COMMON OBJECTIVES, AND THAT I HOPED THAT ANY STATEMENT MADE BY CARAMANLIS WOULD BE BASED ON A SIMILAR PREMISE AND APPROACH.

7. COMMENT: I FELT THAT MUCH OF BITSIOS' CHIDING WAS JUST TO TRY AND MAKE SOME DIPLOMATIC BARGAINING POINTS. I REFRAINED FROM POINTING OUT--WANTING TO END THE CAVILING AND GET ON TO OTHER IMPORTANT BUSINESS--HOW HARD THE GREEKS ARE TO PLEASE: IF WE ARE TOO PRAISING AND SOLICITOUS OF CARAMANLIS PUBLICLY HE FEELS IT HURTS HIM POLITICALLY IN GREECE, AND IF WE ARE NOT HE CLAIMS WE MUST BE ANTI-GREEK. IT IS A FINE LINE TO WALK. IN FACT I AM NOT SURE THERE IS EVEN A LINE THERE.
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